



New Leash on Life

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A unique program at the Robinson Correctional Center is helping more than just the inmates. It's called the Loving Arms Rehabilitation Kennel or LARK and it brings man and man's best friend together

The program was started to help greyhounds that have spent their lives racing. Most of the dogs have never interacted with people and many come with injuries that have to be rehabbed. The inmates help the dogs get ready to be adopted into a home, but this program doesn't just help the animals.

A second chance - that's what a group of inmates at Robinson Correctional Center are giving retired racing dogs

Dr. Dee Dee Brookhart, the Assistant Warden of Programs at the prison said, "Sit, stay, don't jump on people, be well behaved, and learn how to play with toys, walk up and down steps... These are all things these dogs don't know how to do because all they've done is raced and lived in a crate."

The first dogs came into the LARK program three years ago. The inmate handlers work in teams to help the greyhounds learn how to interact with people.

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One of the handlers, John, said, "We put a lot of work into the dogs. You know when that dog drops his guard down and gives you kisses that's a good feeling."

So far, every dog that has been rehabilitated by the prisoners has been adopted to a family. Like Jax, who didn't know his name when he came into the program. When he left, he was considered a good citizen dog and was adopted to a 6 year old boy with autism.

"It's a good feeling to know that we do that stuff... Bring joy to people's lives. We're not just sitting in here doing time," said Jason, another handler.

Handler Andy added, "Coming down here was a way for me to you know be able to reach out and do something positive for the community."



But this program doesn't just help the dogs and the families that adopt them.

"I came in here I was young. I didn't know what responsibility was. And now every day we get up at 5:00 with these dogs. They totally depend on us. The staff doesn't feed them, nothing like that. It's all on us," said Jason.

John said, "It's a good feeling. You get a sense of accomplishment."

The success of the LARK program goes beyond teaching a dog to sit and stay. It's good for the morale of facility too.

"You know even the big burly guys come up, you know getting all smiley and tears eyed petting the dog. It's a good feeling," said Jason.

"It's unbelievable the changes it's made here in this facility and I just can't say enough good things about it," said Dr. Brookhart.

The program has 8 handlers and 2 alternates working with 4 dogs at a time. Handlers work with their dog all day, every day.

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The dogs are actually very sweet dogs. They wear muzzles are for their own protection. They are competitive race dogs with very thin skin. The muzzles stop them from nipping at and hurting each other.

Handlers are chosen after a detailed screening process. Administration looks at their criminal history, their disciplinary history and other factors. They go through training in order to handle the dogs.

Families adopting the dogs also go through a screening process with Midwest Greyhound Adoption. The center makes sure that the home fits the dog. The LARK program is entirely supported and funded by Midwest Greyhound Adoption.